



FARMERS' FRIEND IN STATE CAPITAL

'Of, By and For the Farmer' Describes the State Department of Agriculture in New Jersey, Making It Unique Among Similar Bodies in That Farmers Control Organization's Membership and Program

By JOHN T. CUNNINGHAM

JANUARY is that happy mid-point between last year's harvest and this year's plowing, when a farmer pauses to mend his social and political fences. It's the time—perhaps the only time all year—when farmers have spare hours to sit through the round of speeches and panel discussions which feature the annual Farmers Week in Trenton.

Optimism runs high in January. Farm magazine ads glow in anticipation of harvests from seeds not yet planted. Stormy weather only adds to the optimism; the deeper the snow the richer the pastures come May. On this high tide of bubbling good cheer the State Department of Agriculture

milking and egg-gathering and machine repairing, the Department of Agriculture repairs to its steam-heated office pastures at 1 W. State St., Trenton, to decide what can be reaped from the seeds of opinion planted during Farmers Week.

Ideas from Farmers Week the department has aplenty. Ways to spend money it has in good measure. Items for legislative action are neatly typed on resolution after resolution. Out of this must be sifted the next year's work for the Farmers of W. State St.

The State Department of Agriculture is of the farmers, by the farmers and for the farmers. Its membership and its program is controlled by farmers, yet as an official state body the department must try carefully to plow its way between what is good for the farmer and what is good for 5,000,000 Garden State citizens at large.

This is the second in a series of articles on New Jersey's highly diversified agriculture, vigorous and growing despite the constant inroads of industrial and residential development. Next week: Poultry and Eggs (the state's largest farm items).

FARMERS in other states envy the unique privilege New Jersey agriculturists enjoy to keep their own house in order. Nowhere else is a State Department of Agriculture so firmly in the hands of the men whose affairs it administers.

It has been argued that such farmer-controlled administration could hurt the nonfarming public, but the years have shown that New Jersey farmers have hung on to their privileges by conducting their legislative activities on a plane well above the level of merely selfish "help-the-farmer-and-damn-the-public" legislation.

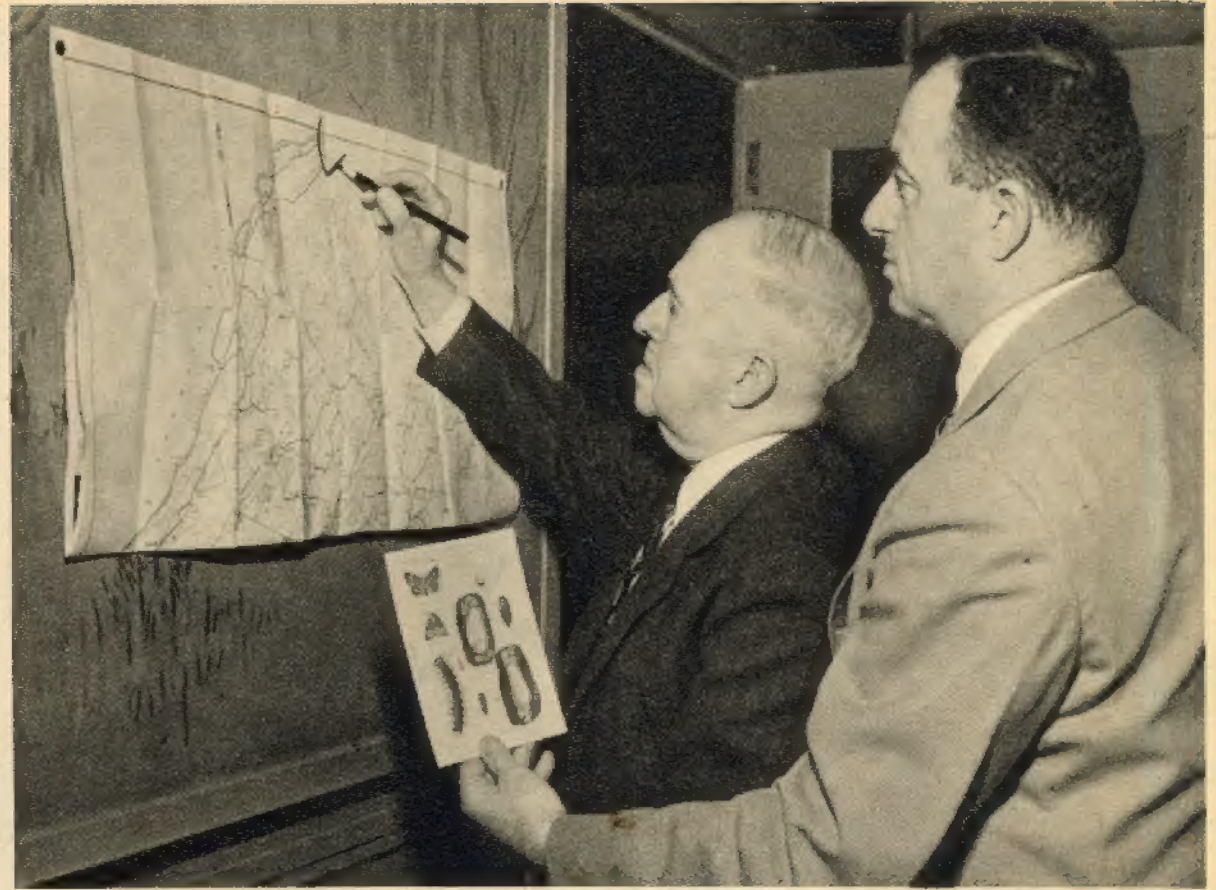
This is how the farmers of New Jersey control the Department of Agriculture: Each year they select two representatives to be recommended to the governor for membership on the State Board of Agriculture and the state board, in turn, is the vital force in the department. The state board is part of the Department

sponsors Farmers Week to launch its program for the year.

Everything from Aberdeen-Angus cattle to honey bees gets a serious and thorough talking-over in crowded meeting rooms. The sessions are technical, too; they are to the farmer what bar association meetings are to the lawyer. Out in the hotel halls, farmers and their wives gather to exchange pleasantries. There's no denying that all New Jersey agriculture reaches both a summing-up point and a jumping-off place during Farmers Week (scheduled this year from January 24 to 29).

When the sounds of discussion die away and farmers return to their

LEFT: Typical Farmers Week activities. From top: Meat cutting demonstration; fun fest at annual Fanny Farmers Breakfast; spelling bee winners and high scorers in State Vo-Ag egg-grading contest.



In 1916 the Department of Agriculture was established and leader in the movement was Joseph S. Frelinghuysen (left), then state senator from Somerset County. At right is Willard H. Allen, present secretary, who has set a national record for period of service.

D. Harry B. Weiss, director of the plant industry division, one of four in the department, and Frank A. Soraci (right), chief of entomology bureau, chart known areas of the gypsy moth. It was Dr. Weiss who discovered the first Japanese beetle in America in 1916.

of Agriculture—an unpaid board of directors in effect—and directly or indirectly selects all department personnel. No one can be a member of the board unless he is a bona fide working farmer.

UNTIL 1944 farmer domination of the state's official agricultural affairs was even more marked than it is today. From the time of the founding of the Department of Agriculture in 1916, the State Board of Agriculture had chosen its own members and its own secretary of agriculture and then had notified the governor of its actions. About all he could say was, "Fine!"

Since 1944, however, the governor by law can approve or disapprove both Board of Agriculture nominees

and the choice of a secretary of agriculture. By law the governor could say nay to the suggestions, but it's likely that tobacco will grow on the hills of Sussex County before any governor has the political temerity to challenge the farmers' own choices. Official New Jersey agriculture is beyond the reach of politicians, who in counting their chickens never expect anything to be hatched for them in the Department of Agriculture—with the lone exception of the director of the Office of Milk Industry, who is a direct appointee of the governor.

That accounts for the fact that in the 39 years since the Department of Agriculture was established, only three secretaries of agriculture have held office. Willard H. Allen, the present secretary, has served since

1938, longer than any other state secretary of agriculture currently active in the nation. Allen has served under six governors—three Republicans, three Democrats.

OBVIOUSLY mere freedom from politicians isn't enough to keep a man in office. It helps, naturally, in a state where any salaried job is eyed hungrily every time power swings from one party to another, yet it's generally agreed that State Department of Agriculture administrators owe their longevity to good administration rather than the political hands off.

Secretary Allen's top aides in the department's four divisions also have had remarkably long terms in office. Dr. R. A. Hendershot has headed the division of animal industry since 1936,

Warren W. Oley has been chief of the division of markets since 1928, Harry B. Weiss has directed the division of plant industry since 1920, and Fred W. Jackson has headed the division of information since it was established in 1942.

The four divisions have had a total of only eight chiefs since 1916—three in the division of markets, two each in plant industry and animal industry and one in information. Loyalty and interest in their work are prime factors in keeping these leaders in Trenton; they can't be paid exorbitant salaries on a department budget which barely climbs above \$1,000,000—including all fees collected by the department.

PERHAPS \$1,000,000 sounds like a great deal to expend on agriculture at that, yet it is only about ½ of 1 per cent of the state's annual expenditures. However, spared the necessity of supporting friends and relatives of politicians, the department can quite nicely carry out its responsibilities of regulating, promoting and supervising New Jersey agriculture.

That covers a lot of territory. Every farmer and farm organization in the state looks to Trenton for accurate statistics. Every farmer enlists the department's help in time of disaster. Marketing groups seek expert information and advice (not to mention funds and aid in market promotion). The department thus stands somewhere between farmer and public, between farmer and state government.

It might be supposed that farmers have an unsullied admiration for the Department of Agriculture. Not so, because the department must also regulate agriculture and enforce the laws. Farmers don't universally love the state veterinarian who vaccinates their livestock or the state inspector who condemns their plants, no matter what the disease or infestation may be.

Progressive farmers have long
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Warren W. Oley, chief of the division of markets since 1928, checking chart for graphic value presentation of the state's agricultural products.



Dr. R. A. Hendershot (right), animal industry division head, explains to visitors from Holland New Jersey's poultry health protection program.



LEFT: Typical state agriculture convention to select two members of board. Secretary Allen is addressing session.

FARMERS' FRIEND

(Continued from Preceding Page)

recognized the need for strict regulation, however, and that heritage is a vital force for today's Department of Agriculture, whose roots go all the way back to the agricultural boards and societies of the 18th Century.

Usually those early societies stuck to county lines, often they existed only to run county fairs and not infrequently they used the fairs as a pretext to improve horse breeds—particularly such ponies who didn't shy when a bet rode on their noses. The New Jersey State Agricultural Society, organized just a century ago on January 24, 1855, finally got farmers together on a statewide basis.

Out of the State Agricultural Society came much of the leadership needed to found the State Board of Agriculture in 1872. If the state board can be said to have been born,

then Dr. George Hammel Cook, professor of agriculture at Rutgers College, must be called the father, because he goaded agricultural leaders into a firm quasi-governmental organization. In recognition, he became the board's first secretary.

The new State Board of Agriculture seemed to many nonfarmers to be just a means to enforce the farmers' will on Trenton, just at a time when New Jersey moved headlong into spiraling industrial growth.

PERHAPS some farmers did feel they might gain selfish ends, yet in simple justice it must be pointed out that a fundamental reason for forming the State Board of Agriculture was not to seek favors but rather to seek legislation aimed at control of dangerous outbreaks of contagious cattle disease. Even in 1872 many farmers

recognized that some of their brethren needed a legislative boot to make them comply with sound farm practices and public health needs.

Other New Jersey agencies poked about in agricultural fields, too; by 1915 a total of 15 state laws spread agricultural regulation among eight different boards, commissions and committees. No one knew for sure whose jurisdiction was what. Often, taking no chances and saving no money, several boards all did the same thing.

Joseph S. Frelinghuysen of Somerville, president of the State Board of Agriculture and state senator from Somerset County, recommended a Department of Agriculture in 1912. That took courage. As early as 1893 a bill had been introduced in the Legislature to establish such a department. Farmers rallied against it, saying they "asked only to be left alone in their educational and practical efforts to improve the agriculture of the state."

Frelinghuysen persisted, calling the

situation "complicated, confusing and cumbersome." Still farmers grumbled their dissent, fearing agriculture was to become a bird in the gilded cage of politics. Eventually other farm leaders backed Frelinghuysen, and in 1916 legislation was enacted to set up the Department of Agriculture.

THE old State Board of Agriculture had so skillfully and so long resisted the wooing of the proponents of a State Department of Agriculture that it won strong powers in the 1916 law. Those powers exist even today; an impartial observer must conclude that the farmers did right well for themselves in the new department.

Passing years have shown that the public in general did right well, too. Down the years the farmers have shown a civic consciousness and the ability to rise above the demands of any one small farm clique. Possibly that has been because of the highly diversified nature of New Jersey agriculture, where the interests of such divergent groups as dairy farmers, vegetable farmers, chicken farmers, nursery men and many others can produce sufficient conflict among themselves to make the upshot serve the common weal.

The Department of Agriculture took solid hold in 1916 under Alva Agee, the first secretary of agriculture. The first three bureau chiefs—Dr. J. H. McNeil in animal industry, Franklin Dye in statistics and inspection (afterward known as plant industry) and Alexis L. Clark in markets—energetically brought order to the new state agency.

THERE was much to be done. Tuberculosis, for example, plagued New Jersey dairy herds and TB became one of the department's first major concerns. As early as the 1890s the State Board of Agriculture had sought to control bovine tuberculosis, but the concern of progressive farmers far outstripped the concern of the State Legislature. Requests for anti-TB funds drew only yawns from the State House, whose agricultural interests then scarcely transcended the state's scandal-ridden race tracks.

By 1916 New Jersey's tuberculosis control centered chiefly on the testing of cattle being shipped into the state. Although the transmission of bovine tuberculosis to humans had been established, control of domestic herds within New Jersey had not been pushed. Much educational work was done with dairymen, who had to be shown that tuberculosis could cost them enormous sums of money (an easier fact to drive home than the cost in human misery of the killing disease).

It seems in retrospect that New Jersey didn't set any speed records in control of bovine tuberculosis, yet the control program must be measured in terms of the day. Public health standards of 30 years ago were a far cry from the standards of 1955. Public funds were hard to get, many



Albert J. Yarina, one of technicians, reading brucellosis test results in the Agriculture Depart-



ment's Trenton laboratories, while Virginia O'Brien tests poultry blood for traces of pullorum disease.

local municipalities stubbornly refused to cooperate, and even the public didn't care much one way or another about its own health.

Anti-TB work picked up pace between 1927 and 1935, largely because state and federal funds became available. Now more than 200,000 dairy cattle are tested annually within the state and the number of reactors has dropped to less than 1-10th of 1 per cent—compared with as many as 10 per cent 40 years ago.

FARMERS seldom resent the state veterinarian's needle today. The years have proved the importance of inoculations and vaccinations. Such diseases as brucellosis in cattle, anthrax in horses and cattle, cholera in hogs and many other once-dreaded crippers have been brought under control through inoculations.

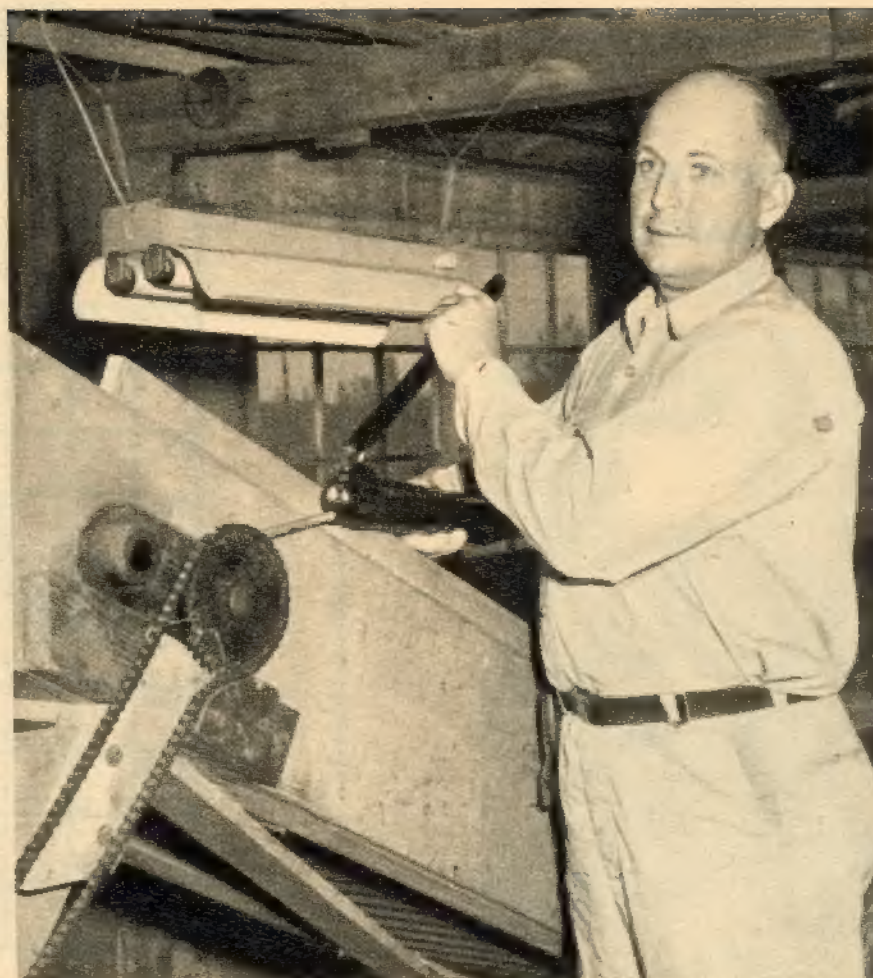
Poultry occupies an increasing amount of the department's time in 1955, as might well be expected since chickens and eggs amount to 40 per cent or more of all New Jersey agricultural income. Poultry disease control started in 1924 after unusual losses struck chickens shipped in from the West to railroad yards in Jersey City and Newark. By 1926 as many as 65,000 birds annually were being condemned, but now, with nearly 9,000,000 chickens tested annually, few diseased chickens are shipped into New Jersey.

More important from the standpoint of poultry's future is the dramatic work being done in ridding the state's flocks of pullorum disease. Once pullorum killed or crippled nearly half of all laying hens, but control work started in 1930 by the Department of Agriculture has radically cut the disease incidence until now fewer than one hen in 200 is found to be infected. Diseased birds are destroyed.

Pullorum tests are made each year on more than 1,000,000 chickens and more than 10,000,000 birds have been tested since the program started. The important thing is that pullorum is not passed on to baby chicks, of extreme significance because one infected baby chick could cause the death or crippling of thousands more.

THE division of plant industry has had some impelling battles with nature through the years, too. Of all the struggles, none have been greater challenges than those of the corn borer, the gipsy moth and the Japanese beetle.

The first corn borer raised his ugly head in New Jersey in 1925, not in a corn field in Burlington County as might have been expected, but on a vacant lot in Bayonne. The federal government cooperated with the Department of Agriculture and in 1930 a total of 30 inspection stations were operated in North Jersey. Eventually the corn borer was tamed, but in the taming, more than 6,000,000 vehicles carrying corn stopped at the stations and five larvae were found. Two of the inspection stations in Hudson County had to be closed precipitously when weekend inspection work backed cars up for miles in the hot summer sun, creating tremendous traffic jams and convincing police



State Board of Agriculture officials—Carleton E. Heritage of Richwood, president, shown in workshop



of his 125-acre farm, and Walter M. Ritchie of Rahway, vice president, who maintains 30-acre nursery.

that the larvae couldn't begin to be as boring as a Sunday afternoon in the sun.

During the last week of June 1920 the Duke estate at Somerville reported numerous caterpillars digesting the estate's evergreens. Department of Agriculture field men found the culprit to be the gipsy moth, long a menace in Europe. The moths had already defoliated one full acre and had marked hundreds more acres for the menu by the time field men reached the denuded evergreens.

Within a year the infected area had spread over 410 square miles centered on Somerville. Hundreds of trained scouts went into the field, looking under every rock and inspecting every tree, fence post and building in the 410 square miles. They worked meticulously all the way out to the edge of the gipsy moth area, then worked back to Somerville—spraying, chopping down dead trees, banding untouched trees with sticky substance to keep the larvae away. The first year, 3,000,000 egg masses were found in New Jersey; the second year only 909 could be found.

PROBABLY no agricultural search anywhere has ever been as concentrated and conscientious as that New Jersey hunt for the voracious gipsy. Work went on intensively until the early 1930s and is still being carried on as a preventative measure. Occasionally a gipsy moth is found, but today it can't escape to eat home and house out of countryside.

Prompt action saved New Jersey, and possibly much of the nation, from the gipsy moth. Equally prompt action might have put the Japanese beetle in its place after Harry B. Weiss (present head of the division of plant industry) discovered the first Japanese beetle in America in 1916 at a nursery at Cinnaaminson.

Weiss had the beetle identified at the United States National Museum,

then looked up Japanese agricultural literature to become convinced the beetle posed a serious threat. A full-scale war was plotted against the Oriental insect, but funds couldn't be raised to hire labor or to develop an insecticide. By 1920, when the beetle had spread out over 50 square miles (compared with the half-mile of 1916), hopes for eradication had to be abandoned.

A YEAR later the Japanese invader had covered 213 square miles and his broad gustatorial tastes made him a threat to at least 200 food plants—or just about every crop grown in New Jersey. Some expanded federal and state funds became available in 1924, but by then the beetle had wandered too far. Now, as even the most neophyte gardener knows, the Japanese beetle is here to stay.

Control of diseases and insects means greater yield to the farmer, as indeed do all modern farming methods. That gives the Department of Agriculture's division of markets ever-increasing importance, since there is widespread agreement that marketing is now the real frontier in New Jersey agriculture. Marketing will be covered fully in another article in this series; suffice it to say here that out of the Department of Agriculture will come the statistics and much of the experience that will go into the marketing of the future.

The work of the department spreads outward—to assembling statistics, digesting them and making them palatable and understandable to the farmer and the public; to certifying seeds and inspecting fruit and vegetables, to helping fruit and vegetable growers plan promotion programs, to sifting through the scores of proposals from farmer and consumer alike to find a program of value to as many people as possible. It requires a payroll of 136 persons, far more than half of them being veterinarians, field and laboratory

technicians and other highly trained experts.

The Office of Milk Industry, created in 1933 as the Milk Control Board, has been part of the Department of Agriculture since 1949. This move brought what had been an independent agency into more direct association with the department, thus making the milk industry a more integral part of the complete agricultural picture. Nevertheless the OMI is close to politics, since the whole question of milk production and milk pricing is political dynamite.

Many agencies affect agriculture in the state over and above the Department of Agriculture, but it's unlikely that any single New Jersey farm meeting has more significance than the convention of agriculturists during Farmers Week. That is the convention when 85 farmers, representing every county (even Hudson sent two delegates last year after being unheard of agriculturally for decades), every grange and every farm group of importance, select the two farmers who will be members for four years of the State Board of Agriculture.

THE convention is as rural-tinged as any meeting can be. Delegates come from such decidedly un-metropolitan spots as Green Creek, Minotola, Cedarville, Sussex, Freehold and Flemington. Conversely, it has been many a long year since anyone came from Newark or Camden or Atlantic City. This is a meeting of rural minds, bent on performing a serious job in a worthwhile way.

Out of this convention comes the Board of Agriculture, and directly through the board's power, the Department of Agriculture. The consumer has no direct representative, but happily the farmer can—and does—rise above his own product, his own selfish interests, and finds himself (possibly to his own surprise on occasion) representing the general public as well as the man with the plow.